

Responding to COVID-19: How early years settings supported children's language and communication development and encouraged parental partnerships

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Abstract

This study explores how a group of early years settings encouraged parental partnerships during COVID-19 restrictions. It provides recommendations for how other early years practitioners (EYPs) could be supported to implement additional strategies post-pandemic. The importance of parental partnerships, especially in the early years, is identified by research (Gorard and See, 2013) and highlighted in the UK EYFS curriculum (DfE, 2021; DfE, 2017) but little is known about how schools support parental engagement (Axford et al., 2019). While not originally considered by the research team, the ORIM framework (Hannon, 1995) emerged as a relevant and clearly specified model to understand parental engagement. This qualitative research involved interviews with EYPs from ten schools and one nursery in the North East of England. They were asked about changes to their practice and we identified common themes. We followed BERA ethical guidelines. All participants were given information sheets and signed consent forms, and all findings have been anonymised. COVID-19 affected all areas of children's lives, with language and communication being of particular concern to teachers; many children now need support to catch up. The pandemic highlighted the importance of positive relationships between schools and parents. Our research highlighted the importance of supporting parents to understand how to support their children and why this is important, this supported their agency. Our research suggests there is a potential for a more explicit application of the ORIM framework to bring benefits to early years settings, parents/caregivers and children.

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